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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [PGOV](#) [UN](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: ABYEI MILITIA CLASH REMAINS CLOUDED

REF: KHARTOUM 627

Classified By: Political Officer Ron Capps for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) The clash near Abyei on March 8 (reftel) between units of the South Sudan Defense Force (SSDF) remains contentious and unclear. PolMil officer and Defense Liaison Officer spoke to United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) Force Commander (FC) LTG Lidder on March 18 to discuss (inter alia) the clash. Lidder claimed he had no idea who was behind the attack, but said he had visited the site of the attack. He said 37 people were killed in the attack. That count significantly raises the number of dead from earlier reports of 10 to 12. Lidder also said over 100 persons were missing.

¶2. (C) Lidder said the only clarity in the situation was that with the March 9th deadline for Other Armed Groups (OAGs) to affiliate either with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) or the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) it appeared that Paulino Matip was moving troops under his control south out of Khartoum, and doing so without UNMIS or SAF knowledge. He said groups which had aligned with the SAF were also moving. Lidder will form a joint investigation commission, including members of the SAF and SPLA, under the aegis of the Cease Fire Joint Military Commission.

¶3. (C) A humanitarian aid worker who was in Abyei on the evening of the skirmish told the following story: The skirmish involved units of the South Sudan United Movement (SSUM). UNMIS officers reportedly told the relief worker that a group of approximately 100 SSUM fighters and their families were moving south from Khartoum towards Abyei. These men had chosen to align with the SAF rather than the SPLA. A second SSUM group, under the commander of Colonel Thaele, began moving north to intercept the recruits, and did so near Golai. Colonel Thaele had previously decided to align his forces with the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) and moved his unit north to intercept the recruits to forestall their absorption into the SAF. When the two groups met, Thaele's troops instructed the recruits to dismount and began separating the officers from the enlisted men, at which point firing broke out, leaving six dead and 27 wounded.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The variations in numbers of killed and wounded will take time to sort through. UNMIS' willingness to try to help is a positive sign of both Lidder and SRSG Pronk's determination to keep the peace process on track. Lidder told us that UNMIS will escort all unit re-location convoys in the future.
STEINFELD